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AUTHOR	Hall, James L.; McDaniel, Drew O.
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ABSTRACT

Many of the more than 140 shortwave broadcasting services currently in operation have programing specifically intended for an audience in the United States, yet relatively little is known about the shortwave listening audience in the United States. This study focuses upon the shortwave listeners who regularly monitor international broadcasts. A questionnaire was sent to the 675 members of the Newark News Radio Club in March, 1973. Of these, 304 questionnaires (45 percent) were returned. From the data the following conclusions could be drawn: (1) Regular listeners tend to be highly educated males with the clear majority over 30 years of age; (2) The regular listener tunes in to shortwave broadcasts nearly 17 hours per week; (3) Hobby and interest in logging distant stations were first and second while the third, fourth, and sixth most often noted reasons for monitoring international broadcasting services among listeners related to news and information received through the broadcasts; (4) News, commentary, and documentary (in that order) were the most preferred program types among listeners; and (5) The four favorite international services are Radio Nederland, Radio Australia, BBC, and Radio Canada International. (DGC)

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE REGULAR SHORTWAVE LISTENER IN THE UNITED STATES

A Paper Presented

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By

James L. Hall
University of Southern Mississippi

and

Drew O. McDaniel
Ohio University

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE REGULAR SHORTWAVE
LISTENER IN THE UNITED STATES

A substantial number of the over 140 international shortwave services operating today broadcast programs specifically intended for an audience in the United States. Literally hundreds of hours of such programming is available in the U.S. each week. Despite the sizeable programming commitment by international broadcasters, little is actually known about the shortwave listening audience in the United States. Over the history of shortwave broadcasting, scientific survey methods utilizing random sampling of the general U.S. population have rarely been employed by researchers in international communication studies.[1]

Out of the limited research on the shortwave audience, two reported observations should be noted: First, these studies have consistently identified the shortwave listener as a person who indicated that he monitored international broadcasting services at least once per month with most respondents merely satisfying this basic requirement. A second reported observation is that the regular shortwave listener (SWL) or hobbyist, is a "technician" primarily interested in logging distant (DX) services and collecting confirmation (QSL) cards. Moreover, at least one researcher has asserted that the SWL, the hobbyist, is an atypical listener and should be excluded from audience analyses of the general U.S. population.[2]

The thesis of the study reported here is that the SWL is not merely a "technician" but is a more discriminating, sophisticated auditor than the casual, infrequent listener of international broadcasting services. Consequently, specific information concerning listener motivations and preferences about programming can be better obtained from the SWL than from others. The focus of this study, then, was the SWL hobbyist, the regular monitor of international services. In the main, the following questions were considered:

(1) Who is the SWL in the United States?
(2) How much time do these SWL's devote to shortwave, medium wave and television programming?
(3) Why do these regular listeners monitor international shortwave services?
(4) What program types are preferred by regular shortwave listeners?
(5) What international services are most frequently cited by SWL's as their favorites?

Methodology of the Study

To answer these questions, the researchers sought to query the SWL hobbyist. Several U.S. radio listening clubs were contacted seeking permission to use their membership mailing list or to publish the study's questionnaire in their club newsletter. From those agreeing to aid the study, the Newark News Radio Club (NNRC) of New Jersey was selected to participate in the survey. The selection of NNRC was based largely upon membership size and its stature in the SWL fraternity.

The NNRC agreed to place a questionnaire in the March, 1973 mailing of their monthly newsletter. The entire membership of the club (675) received the questionnaire. Only those questionnaires

returned to the researchers within five weeks of the initial mailing date were included in the study. There were 304 questionnaires, or a 45 per cent return, available for the analyses.

The U.S. Shortwave Audience

Four demographic areas of concern were identified in this study as meriting examination: age, sex, occupation, and education. The principal reason for gathering data on these topics was to test possible relationships with other matters under study.

Responses to all items seeking demographic information were quite high; only 3 per cent did not indicate their age and the other items drew response from more than 99 per cent of the sample group. Table 1 contains the demographics of these SWL's. Nearly 57 per cent of the respondents were over 30 years of age and over one-quarter of these listeners were over 50 years old. Apparently, the shortwave listener who takes his hobby seriously is just as likely to be a person of mature age as he is to be youthful.

These findings require a qualification. The Newark News Radio Club is the oldest radio hobbyist group in the United States and for a long period of time it was, in effect, the only major club with an interest in shortwave listening. In recent years other clubs have come into being which may have attracted more young listeners than the NNRC. Therefore, older shortwave listeners may constitute a disproportionate segment of the NNRC membership.

Of the 302 respondents who indicated their sex, only four were female. It is conceded that men are in the majority among hobbyist listeners but whether or not these figures are reflective

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TABLE 1

AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS

Age			Education			Occupation		
Years	Number (N=296)	Percent	Years	Number (N=301)	Percent	Occupation	Number (N=302)	Percent
-14	9	3.0%	Less than 8 years	5	1.7%	Student	62	20.5%
15-18	33	11.1	Elementary	11	3.7	Labor or Craftsman	38	12.6
19-22	24	8.1	High School	96	31.9	Professional	88	29.1
23-20	63	21.3	Some College	74	24.6	Business	40	13.2
31-40	57	19.3	College Graduate	49	16.3	Clerical	13	4.3
41-50	28	9.5	Graduate School	66	21.9	Retired	29	10.6
51-60	44	14.9						
61-70	31	10.5						
+70	7	2.4						

of U.S. listeners generally, cannot be known.

There were some surprises in looking at the occupations of the respondents. As noted in Table 1, students accounted for a sizable portion of this study's respondents; but their number was dramatically overshadowed by the number of professional persons reporting. Slightly less than one-third of those reporting described themselves as professional. Even assuming some bending of the accepted definitions of the term "profession" on the part of those answering the questionnaire, the proportion was impressive.

Over 20 per cent of the persons studied were either retired or were engaged in an occupation which did not fit neatly into one of the five categories provided in the questionnaire. Many of those fitting into the "other" category were engaged in military service. In fact, judging from circumstantial evidence (Army and Navy FPO addresses) military personnel seemed to be present in unexpected numbers in this study. But since they could not be positively identified, it was impossible to estimate their number.

Relatively few businessmen or clerical workers were reported in this study--together, the two occupations accounted for less than 20 per cent of these respondents. However, many of those retired appeared, from their comments, to be former businessmen.

The unusual number of professionals responding to this questionnaire suggests high education levels among the entire group. As seen in Table 1, nearly two-thirds of those reporting indicated that they had been students at the college level. Moreover, the tabulation shows that nearly one-fourth of these SWL's have attended graduate school. These findings show that the

shortwave listener represented in this study are members of an elite sector of society: They are well-educated and members of the professions. Often mature men, they probably assert some influence on others making them a highly respectable audience for international broadcasters.

Media Use

Table 2 shows the tabulations concerning media consumption among these regular shortwave listeners. As indicated, the average weekly hours devoted to medium wave (standard broadcast band) listening is 9.4 hours and for television viewing 11.7 hours. While these weekly-use figures for medium wave broadcasting are close to the national average, the television viewing hours of the shortwave hobbyists are not.[3] One might be tempted to conclude that television viewing and shortwave listening are conflicting activities since the "prime-time" for both is usually considered to be during the early evening hours. However, as seen in Table 2, the weekly average shortwave listening during the evenings is 3.5 hours compared with weekly average daytime listening of 7.5 hours. Thus, these respondents spend nearly twice as much time listening during the day than at night. This is particularly surprising since most observers would likely assume nighttime as being the prime hours for international broadcasting. One possible explanation is that these figures do not differentiate between weekday and weekend hours. A large part of the weekly listening patterns may be over the weekend when the majority of respondents would not be at work or at school. Additional research, however, is needed to investigate

TABLE 2

TOTAL WEEKLY LISTENING HOURS
BY MEDIA
(N=304)

	Daytime	Nighttime	Weekend	Total Weekly Hours
Shortwave	7.5	3.5	6.1	11.0
Medium Wave	--*	--*	--*	9.4
Television	--*	--*	--*	11.7

*Questionnaire did not probe the times for these media.

precise daytime-nighttime and weekday-weekend listening hours before any conclusions can be drawn.

The demographics of the audience analyzed here may provide the best explanation for this atypical listening pattern. These respondents, for example, tend to be highly educated and from professional occupations. As previous research has repeatedly indicated, the educated, the professionals and the more affluent watch relatively little television in the United States.

These data suggest that regular listeners to international broadcasting devote considerable time to monitoring shortwave services. The key question proposed for this study was concerned about the notion that shortwave hobbyists may be atypical listeners and interested more in the technicalities of the medium. Why do these SWL's seek broadcasts from foreign broadcasting operations? Interesting motivations were cited.

Listener Motivations

The subjects were asked to indicate those reasons which best explain why they listen to shortwave broadcasts. Two or three reasons were requested and most respondents offered that number.

As shown in Table 3, the first and second most often cited reason for tuning shortwave were related to the hobby of DXing. This finding is not surprising if one considers that the participants in this survey are members of a DX hobby club. The interesting point is that the third, fourth, and sixth most often cited reasons were concerned with news and information. These listener

TABLE 3

REASONS INDICATED BY LISTENERS
FOR TUNING SHORTWAVE

Reasons	Percentage	Rank
Hobby of DXing	87.8	(1)
Enjoyment of listening to faraway places	60.5	(2)
To get a different perspective on the news	43.4	(3)
Learn about the world	34.2	(4)
Entertaining programs	23.3	(5)
Information on a country that interests me	19.0	(6)
Understanding other people	11.5	(7)
Other	7.8	(8)

preferences strongly support this study's basic contention that the hobbyist is not merely interested in hearing stations, obtaining QSL's and enlarging his confirmed country totals. Quite the contrary, the results obtained here indicate that hobby motivations are only a part of the preferences; the content of broadcasts, especially news and information, is of considerable interest.

Another interesting corollary to the programming preferences concerns the fifth most often cited reason for shortwave listening--entertainment. Since "entertaining program" is a vague term encompassing a wide variety of program types, including drama, music, discussion, and so on, it is difficult to interpret this finding without further research. It seems clear, however, that "entertaining programs" is not one of the principal motivations for shortwave listeners. It may be that in the United States the desire for these programs may be better filled by domestic media services. On the other hand, nearly one-quarter of all respondents cited entertainment as one of the main reasons for listening to shortwave; thus, this minority is substantial.

Only slightly more than 10 per cent of the sample indicated that "understanding other people" was a reason for listening to international broadcasting services. Although this motivation is offered by some governments as a justification for engaging in international broadcasting activities, the majority of listeners queried in this study appear to disagree that this is an important consideration. Closely related to listener motivations are program preferences. An examination of these respondents' preferred program types follows.

Program Preferences

The subjects were asked to place in rank order the following catagories of programs: classical music, drama, light music, discussion, documentary, commentary, news, and popular music. Table 4 illustrates the rankings. News programs were clearly the most favored. Among all listeners polled, less than 9 per cent ranked news lower than fourth while nearly half ranked it first. Next were commentary and documentary, two additional information-type programs. These two types were closely ranked but were judged considerably less preferred than news and slightly higher than the next preferred program type, popular music.

The ranking of popular music proved to be important. While the other program types showed a pattern more or less approximating a normal distribution across ranks, the popular music category scores were spread over the entire rating scale, from one to eight. This finding was so striking it was decided to examine this phenomenon further. The frequency distribution of the rankings by respondents is shown in Table 5

The term "popular music" may be ambiguous. For many listeners, the term may denote music of the U.S. "top-forty" stations while others may give "popular music" a broader meaning: all non-serious, non-mood, and non-religious music. While the term "popular music" may have confused some respondents, it is unlikely that this was the cause of the distribution pattern described here.

A closer examination of Table 5 reveals that the distribution of rankings is tri-modal at points one, five, and eight on the scale. This tri-modal peaking suggests that there may be three

TABLE 4

LISTENERS RANK OF PREFERENCE
FOR PROGRAM TYPES

Composite Rank	Program Type	Mean Rank of Listeners
1	News	2.17
2	Commentary	3.50
3	Documentary	3.72
4	Popular Music	4.32
5	Discussion	4.55
6	Light Music	4.74
7	Classical Music	5.80
8	Drama	6.66

TABLE 5

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF LISTENERS' RANKING OF POPULAR MUSIC

Rank	Frequency	Precentage of Listeners
1	51	18.6
2	29	10.6
3	26	9.5
4	35	12.7
5	46	16.7
6	29	10.6
7	16	5.8
8	43	15.6

distinct points of view on popular music or three different kinds of audiences. Roughly one-quarter of the subjects ranked popular music at or near the top of the program list. One-third of the respondents were ambivalent toward popular music, ranking it about the middle of the list. On the other hand, one in five subjects felt quite negative about popular music as a program type, placing it at or near the bottom of the list.

Further analyses were conducted to explore this finding. The placement given popular music was compared with variables to assess possible correlations. For example, does the listener who prefers popular music spend less time listening to shortwave? Apparently not, since the Pearson product-moment correlation between the amount of shortwave heard weekly and the rank given popular music was found to be not significant (r=0.020). Several other variables, e.g., age, education and occupation, among others were also subjected to correlation analyses but no significant relationships to the rating of popular music were found.

The role of music in shortwave broadcasts has been questioned for a number of years. Some services have almost abandoned music altogether while others have made music their key programming element. In terms of audience preferences, the results reported here are highly interesting: (1) The preference for information programming over music is quite distinct in the listeners polled in this study; (2) Classical music was, by far, least favored and light music was not very popular. The reasons behind these preferences are not clear. Perhaps, as noted by some international broadcasters, conditions on the higher frequencies are not conducive

to enjoyable listening of classical music. Or, for that matter, this audience may not have a taste for higher forms of music. Moreover, the favorable position given to popular music should not be taken at face value. More research with a more precise definition of music forms is necessary before any solid conclusions can be reached.

In summary, the top four program types selected by these respondents were: news, commentary, documentary, and popular music. The remaining program types preferred, in descending order, were: discussion, light music, classical music, and drama. It follows that those international services that provide these preferences in their programming would be possible. The researchers probed the question of "popularity" to discern which services were the most favorite among these listeners.

Favorite International Services

The item on the questionnaire which sought to investigate the "popularity" notion asked the respondents to "think of the broadcasts you hear regularly. Please name your four favorite international shortwave broadcasters." The responses were tabulated and the frequencies of mention and the percentages for the ten most often named services are shown in Table 6.

The use of the term broadcaster appeared to confuse some listeners. A few respondents named specific personalities who hosted or were featured in shortwave programs. In each case where this occurred the service which broadcast the programs featuring the personality was given credit for a mention as a favorite service.

TABLE 6

INTERNATIONAL SERVICES CITED
BY LISTENERS AS A
FAVORITE

Service	Number of Mentions	Percentage of All Listeners
Radio Nederland	152	50.0
Radio Australia	124	40.8
BBC	115	37.8
Radio Canada International	86	28.3
Radio RSA	61	20.1
Swiss Broadcasting Corporation	46	15.1
Deutsche Welle	44	14.5
HCJB	33	10.9
Radio Japan	32	10.5
Radio Prague	17	5.6

One of the most remarkable features of this listing of favorite international broadcasting services is the great disparity between those services at the top of the list and those at the bottom. Out of the over 100 shortwave services available to U.S. audiences, only a handful stands out above all others. Forty-nine services in all were cited as a favorite by one or more of the listeners; but of this number, only nine were named by 10 per cent or more of the listeners polled. Four services were named by more than one-quarter of the respondents.

Obviously only a few services are having great popularity success in the United States while most international broadcasting agencies enjoy relatively little reward for their efforts. What are the few popular services doing that the others are not? That, unfortunately, cannot be answered here but will be the focus of additional research to follow this study.

Conclusions

In retrospect much can be learned from this polling of regular listeners to international broadcasts:

(1) The regular listener has been identified as a highly educated male with the clear majority above 30 years of age;

(2) The regular listener polled here tunes shortwave broadcasts nearly 17 hours per week. Attention to medium wave programming closely approximated the national average for the general population, but was considerably less for television viewing;

(3) The third, fourth, and sixth most often noted reasons for monitoring international broadcasting services among this group were related to news and information. DX-related or hobby motivations took first and second

positions among the members of this specialized listener club. The high rankings of news and information, however, demonstrate that the SWL hobbyist is a sophisticated listener and not merely a "technician" who spends his time completing log books and tuning exotic foreign stations;

(4) News, commentary, and documentary (in that order) were the most preferred program types among the SWL's polled in this study. Also, in terms of this group's preferences, information programming was desired more than music. Classical music was, by far, the least favored, and light music was not very popular;

(5) These regular listeners' four favorite international services were: Radio Nederland, Radio Australia, BBC, and Radio Canada International.

The primary purpose of this study was to demonstrate that the regular shortwave listener, the hobbyist, is a sophisticated member of the U.S. international broadcasting audience. These conclusions clearly support our contention. These respondents, while they represent only a segment of the "mass audience" for international broadcasts, probably reflect the views of the majority who listen considerably more than "once per month."

FOOTNOTES

[1]See Harwood L. Childs, "America's Shortwave Audience," in Harwood L. Childs and John B. Whitton, eds., Propaganda by Shortwave (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1942), pp. 303-345; Harwood L. Childs, "Short-Wave Listening in the United States," Public Opinion Quarterly, Volume 5 (1941), 210-226: E.A. Schuler, "Sampling Listener Reactions to Short-Wave Broadcasts," Public Opinon Quarterly, Volume 5 (1941), 260-266; Don D. Smith, "Is There a U.S. Audience for International Broadcasting?" Journalism Quarterly, Volume 39 (1962), 86-89; Don D. Smith, "America's Shortwave Audience: Twenty-five Years Later," Public Opinion Quarterly, Volume 33 (Winter, 1969-70), 537-545; Don D. Smith, "The U.S. Audience for International Broadcasts," Journalism Quarterly, Volume 47 (1970), 364-366.

[2]Smith, "The U.S. Audience for International Broadcasts," op. cit.

[3]Average television viewing times in the United States vary according to time and source but typically are well in excess of four hours daily.